

Training a Force

Story by SGT Henry Kwan



LTC John Randt

SSG Rene Fournier (*right*) of the Fort Knox, Ky., NCO Academy instructs Iraqi volunteers at Tazsar, Hungary, as an Arabic interpreter translates.

WHILE coalition forces were preparing for the war with Iraq, a team of U.S. soldiers in Tazsar, Hungary, was training the first groups of Iraqi volunteers who will play a critical role in restoring peace in postwar Iraq.

MG David Barno, commander of Task Force Warrior, said these Iraqi exiles will assist in civil-military operations, acting as interpreters and guides, and deploy with civil-affairs units that will move into different areas, after combat, to help provide food, shelter and other relief to civilians displaced by the war.

The Free Iraqi Forces, as they are called, were recruited in the United States, Canada and Western Europe. But while they wear battle-dress uniforms with “FIF” patches on their shoulders and carry 9mm pistols in the field, they’re not intended to join front-line combat units, Barno told Pentagon reporters in a February telephone interview.

Task Force Warrior, stationed at Tazsar Air Base, about 120 miles from Budapest, comprises soldiers from more than 30 Army units. The core cadre

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comes from the 1st Battalion, 61st Infantry Regiment, from Fort Jackson, S.C. But other soldiers involved in the training of the Iraqi volunteers come from Fort Bragg, N.C.; Fort Polk, La.; Fort Knox, Ky.; and Fort Benning, Ga. The team also includes members of the Army National Guard and Army Reserve.

Despite the number of participating units, soldiers in the task force excelled in working as a team, Barno said.

He also thanked the Hungarian government, which has made it possible for the Army to train up to 3,000 Iraqis this year, who will be able to help bring stability to Iraq. The Hungarians provided an “almost ideal training location, and our troops are being extremely well taken care of,”

Barno said.

The Americans graduated their first FIF cohort in February and have incorporated lessons learned into the most recent training sessions.

The training is given in two phases, Barno said, and courses are taught in both English and Arabic.

The first phase, conducted by basic-training drill sergeants from Fort Jackson, includes instruction on such basic skills as map reading, drill and ceremony, rank structure, first aid, landmine identification and the use of the 9mm pistol. Also included are classes in the law of armed conflict and ethical decision making.

“They are eager to learn and they ask a lot of questions,” said SFC Michael Torano, a drill sergeant who taught much of the basic military skills portion of the training to the first group of volunteers. “They know how important this is to their mission,” he said.

In the second phase the volunteers work with civil-affairs specialists from U.S.

Special Operations Command. They’re

taught how to coordinate humanitarian aid between the U.S. military and such relief groups as the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees.

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for Freedom

The Iraqi recruits range in age from 18 to 55. Many are businessmen or teachers with advanced degrees. They represent all regions and the three main ethnic groups in Iraq, Barno said. Before arriving in Hungary they endured a rigorous screening process intended to ensure they have no connections to Saddam Hussein or terrorism.

Each volunteer has shown remarkable dedication, said SFC Clarence Kugler, an instructor from the 350th Civil Affairs Command in Pensacola, Fla.

"They came here because of their convictions and beliefs in a free Iraq, and you can see they share that common thread," Kugler said.

SGM George Duncan, a senior enlisted leader of the

task force, said the instructors adjusted their style of training to better accommodate some of the differences in age and culture. But the way they trained the volunteers was essentially similar to the way they train U.S. soldiers, he said.

"Our biggest challenge was to build an entire training facility and program from the ground up. Since then, the instructors have executed the training with great determination and purpose, and produced a force that's ready to do its job in support of U.S. and coalition forces," Duncan said.

Once finished with the training the volunteers go to the U.S. Central Command area of operations, where they'll assist in the rebuilding of Iraq. 🇺🇸

SSG Kevin P. Bell



A FIF member working with soldiers of the 422nd Civil Affairs Battalion explains to residents of Najaf how much water they can draw from a nearby water tank. FIF members proved extremely valuable as coalition forces moved into Iraq.